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Bi-weekly newsletter

Draft Amendments Aim to Improve Access to Court Records

After five years of work to improve rights of access to information, the USAID Judicial Strengthening Initiative briefed the press on draft regulatory amendments on January 9. Access to court information is blocked by many obstacles, including the conflict of laws and misperceptions about citizen rights. Developed by JSI partner Access to Information Foundation, new draft regulatory amendments seek to clarify conflicting rules and streamline access to court documents and court hearings. The briefing was attended by leading print, radio and television journalists, and the findings were published and broadcast widely. The Tuesday briefing is part of a wider advocacy effort to build public, ministry and parliamentary support for the draft amendments.

On January 24, the JSI will host a forum for Members of Parliament, the Ministry of Justice, lawyers, judges and journalists to discuss the final draft amendments prior to their submission to the Ministry of Justice for enactment. These January events mark the culmination of years of research, working groups, and drafting on this critical aspect of Bulgarian rule of law development. Supported by the JSI, and its predecessor the USAID Judicial Development Project, these efforts to improve the regulatory framework are a critical component of overall judicial reform. At the press briefing on January 9, JSI Director Judge Ken Stuart explained the importance of the changes for the judiciary: "The courts are doing their job, and doing it transparently, but the amended regulations will improve public confidence in the work of courts." ❖

USAID/Bulgaria Launches New Website

USAID/Bulgaria is pleased to announce the launch of its new public website at <http://bulgaria.usaid.gov/>.

The new site provides visitors with updated information about USAID/Bulgaria programs, upcoming events, news, success stories, photos, and publications, presented in an engaging and accessible format. The site features links to partner organizations. Information is available in both English and Bulgarian.

Questions or comments regarding the new site may be addressed to Kalina Vanova, kvanova@usaid.gov

Haskovo is Site of 17th Bulgarian Model Court



Haskovo Regional Court Chairperson Miglena Tyankova receives a Model Court award from USAID Mission Director Michael Fritz.

The Haskovo Regional Court became the latest USAID Model Court on December 15, one of the fastest examples of court reform work under the Courts In Partnership program. Haskovo Regional Court received its honor just a year after starting its intensive Court Improvement Plan, a process guided by the USAID Judicial Strengthening Initiative (JSI). Mission Director Michael Fritz honored Regional Court Chairperson Miglena Tyankova in a ceremony at the Haskovo Municipality.

The Haskovo Regional Court becomes the seventeenth Bulgarian Model Court receiving recognition for its efforts to increase transparency, accountability, and efficiency. The court adopted a systematic approach to improving case management beginning with an analysis of court practices going back three years, followed by disciplinary measures against judges with cases delayed beyond statutory limits, and new time frames developed and enforced by the court.

To improve accountability, the court uses random case assignment software provided by the Supreme Judicial Council, and follows model hiring procedures. Judges and court staff regularly participate in trainings with the JSI, the National Institute of Justice, and the National Association of Court Clerks. The court has also improved public access through use of information boards, directional signage, and brochures; and has strengthened judicial administration through bench-bar meetings and regular meetings among judges. ❖



A Boost to the Profession of Career Counselors

In another step to promote career development for young Bulgarians, the USAID Labor Market Project and the Business Foundation for Education announced on January 9 the establishment of the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) Bulgaria. NBCC is a leading institution in certification of specialists in 40 countries. One of NBCC's most recognized programs is the Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF), which trains career counselors. It was introduced and adapted for Bulgaria in 2005 and already over 100 certified consultants in the country work in the field of higher and secondary education, human resources and employment services.



Gergana Rakovska, Director of the National Board for Certified Counselors Bulgaria, and Ted Iliff of the National Board for Certified Counselors International mark the establishment of the Bulgarian organization.

The new institution will work to maintain and upgrade the skills of certified consultants. NBCC was established in the United States and has over 40,000 certified specialists. Over the last few years the organization opened branches all over the world.

This is one of the last initiatives of the Labor Market Project before its closure in February 2007. The Business Foundation for Education, established by the Labor Market Project and JobTiger, will continue to work for the sustainable development of career orientation and support the activity of the career centers. ❖